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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001264

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - President Bush to India

Iraq Hamas

PARIS - Wednesday, March 01, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

President Bush to India
Iraq
Hamas

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Iraq's mounting violence, although not a lead editorial story is widely reported, including in all electronic media. LCI, the all news TV station called it "the civil war by another name." Le Figaro reports "400 casualties in Iraq in a week," while in Liberation a report describes Moqtada Al-Sadr as a "growing Shiite leader" who calls for "peace while pushing his troops to radicalism." (See Part C)

Both Les Echos and Le Figaro report on President Bush's trip to India. "Bush Courts India, China's Counterweight," headlines Les Echos, while for Le Figaro "Bush Is Looking for an Ally in India." (See Part C)

Israel's position on Hamas is reported in Le Figaro, as Israel's FM Tzipi Livni begins her European tour to "convince the international community to remain firm vis--vis Hamas." (See Part C) She starts in France, where she plans to present her condolences to the family of Illan Halimi. In her interview in Le Figaro she praises France for its handling of incidents related to anti-Semitism. About Hamas she says: "Elections cannot function like a washing machine: a terrorist group cannot enter the electoral system and come out a legitimate political party."

Liberation carries an op-ed on France and its history of anti-Semitism by political analyst Alain Duhamel entitled "France's Anti-Semitism." He contends there are various forms of anti-Semitism in France, "a tradition in our country," he writes, "at times virulent, at others more latent but always present. France is threatened by antagonism between its communities."

Angela Merkel's one hundred days in office elicits several editorial commentaries: her popularity ratings remain high, but she, like Vilepin in France, is at the mercy of the negative effects of growing unemployment and the need for reforms.

Le Figaro devotes a half-page report to France's "biometric passport mess," calling France "Europe's poor student" when it comes to delivering the passport "required by the U.S." And quotes an industrialist who says that the biometric passport is "the Clemenceau of the Interior Ministry." CG Don Wells is quoted on the visa requirements. The report also notes that France's highest judicial body, le Conseil d'Etat, will debate today about whether to allow the Interior Ministry to give the passport printing job to a private printing company, thus bypassing the suit filed by the unions of the Imprimerie Nationale. A separate article relates the costs and the delays involved in getting a visa for the U.S. and mentions that French citizens can get visas in Brussels or Frankfurt. Don Wells is again quoted on the need for French travelers to "make sure they have the proper travel documents before buying their air tickets."

Vladimir Putin pens an op-ed in Le Figaro on energy security and his priorities for the G8, as Russia takes on the presidency of the group for 2006. Putin promotes a long-term strategy of energy cooperation worldwide, based on reasonable prices and ecological necessity. Putin is also promoting innovating technologies as well as "inviting non G8 members to participate, namely those with an important economic development." Putin warns against "energy selfishness." In addition to energy, Putin puts forth his idea to fight Avian Flu and promote education.

Les Echos carries an op-ed by Stephan Richter of the Globalist on the "hidden side of American immigration." Richter argues that those who criticize immigration (legal as well as

illegal) should consider the fact that a large number of these immigrants will be paying for their retirement. This is why immigrants need to be better educated so they can hold better paying jobs.

Catholic La Croix reports on the Turkish anti-American film, "The Valley of Wolves," noting that "the U.S. Embassy in Ankara wants to minimize the impact of the film: `people make the difference between a movie and reality.'" The movie shown in Germany has triggered a debate because the Bavarian President Edmund Stoiber has asked for it to be banned.

The spread of Avian Flu and the first case of a mammal infected with the H5N1 virus - a reported dead cat in Germany - continue to elicit widespread reporting. Quoting Moliere, the regional Dauphine Libere quips: "What's new? The little cat died."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

President Bush to India

"Bush Looking for an Ally in India"
Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro (03/01): "President Bush is not looking for Indian folklore but for strong allies in a strategic region for the U.S. Washington has for a long time neglected the Indian Colossus, because of its poverty, economic self-sufficiency and its political non-alignment. The first challenge for the U.S. President will be the signing of the nuclear cooperation agreement, which is eliciting tension in both countries. Just when the U.S. is trying to put together an international coalition against Iran, the preferential treatment offered India is considered by many to be counter productive. And while the Pentagon's dreams for a 'counterweight' to China appear to be unrealistic, India as a faithful regional super power in the war against terrorism remains a viable option."

"A Visit Dominated by Nuclear Issues"

Gabriel Gresillon in right-of-center Les Echos (03/01): "There is no doubt that India represents a central piece in the international strategic system the U.S. wants to build up. Through economic agreements but also a commercial nuclear cooperation agreement, the U.S. is sending the message that India, the world's largest democracy, is back in its radar. But the chances for signing the nuclear cooperation agreement are slim: resistance is strong in both countries. In the U.S., voices have been raised against it because a breach in the NPT would make it even harder to adopt a firm stance vis--vis other nations, starting with Iran. In India meanwhile, Washington's demands with regard to its commercial nuclear program are perceived as a sign that India is losing its independence."

Iraq

"Al-Sadr's War and Peace"

Christophe Ayad in left-of-center Liberation (03/01): "One man has benefited from the recent skirmishes between religious groups: Moqtar al-Sadr, the pyromaniac firefighter. While his militia burned the Samara Mosque, he was calling the Sunnis and Shiites to unite. His political ascent is no longer in doubt: from being marginalized two years ago, he has now become one of three major poles of power in Iraq. One thing which has not changed is his fierce anti-Americanism, which has earned him support from the Sunnis. And his recent support of Hamas has elicited support from Iran and Syria."

Hamas

"Israel Asks for Determination Against Hamas"

Patrick Saint-Paul in right-of-center Le Figaro (03/01): "Israel wants to avoid a confrontation with Europe and its financing of the Palestinian people. Foreign Minister Livni is touring Europe to ask for a firm stance when it comes to dealing with Hamas. Her position with regard to Mahmoud Abbas has caused some strife within her own government: she considers it is useless to pursue contacts with him once Hamas has formed its new government, while PM Olmert, in an effort not to upset the U.S., is in favor of Abbas retaining his position. Despite this apparent divergence of views, Livni insists she and Olmert are not at odds." STAPLETON